

Before the Second World War there was little outright professional football in Canada. With the open payment of players under a contract the game has enjoyed a meteoric rise, stimulated by the importation of outstanding stars graduated from American universities. So that the Canadian-born players won't be totally submerged in this incoming tide of American talent, a limit of 12 "imports" has been set by the leaders of the three major leagues now operating in the east and the west.

The Inteprovincial Rugby Football Union, commonly known as the "Big Four", comprises teams in Montreal, Ottawa, Hamilton and Toronto, the latter three in the Province of Ontario. Rated of equal rank with the Big Four, the Western Conference embraces clubs in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Regina, Saskatchewan; Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta; and Vancouver, in British Columbia. Champions of the two leagues stage a sudden-death game for the Canadian professional championship for a trophy donated by Earl Grey in 1909 when he was Governor General.

With only one interruption - in 1955, when Vancouver was the site of the game-the championship contest for the Grey Cup has been awarded to the City of Toronto, despite frequent bids from rival cities. The authorities are firmly convinced that Ontario's metropolis offers the most reasonable chance of favorable weather on the last Saturday in November, when the big contest is usually scheduled. And the stadium at the University of Toronto, which seats 27,000, is always filled to capacity.

So popular has the Grey Cup game become in modern times that it has gained all the trappings of a national festival. On the eve of the game a huge banquet is held in one of the large hotels. On the morning of the contest a big street parade is staged. Most of Canada's larger cities are officially represented by marching delegations, floats and mobile exhibitions depicting historical events and personalities, industrial products, and natural resources. Cowboys and cowgirls, rearing broncos, and chuckwagons with a prairie-type meal in preparation, may be seen, symbolic of the old west and its pioneer spirit. The tuques and moccasins of the "coureur de bois", along with his snowshoes, will be Quebec's reminder that civilization was brought to the New World by such voyageurs three centuries ago.

Though ranked a shade below the Big Four and Western Conference, the Ontario Rugby Football Union is noted for robust competition. Its devotees are now irked that O.R.F.U. champions aren't permitted to play a sudden-death game with one of the other champions, the surviving team to enter the Grey Cup final. This is a matter of legislation within the football hierarchy.

On an amateur or semi-professional scale there are intermediate and junior leagues, and the game thrives in high schools and colleges.

Soccer is also well-organized. Until a few years ago the game was played and patronized largely by recent settlers from the British Isles and their first-generation descendants. But heavy immigration in the decade since the Second World War has widened its popularity. The calibre of play has vastly improved with the influx of many European nationals adept in the game.